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HEALTH PROBLEMS OF THE NEGROES

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It is gratifying to state that the Negroes are becoming very active in the crusade against preventable diseases. In many places, without quibbling over such academic questions as whether the Negro is dying as rapidly as some other people, or whether there is some racial inherency productive of its high mortality, or whether it is due to environment, the race is realizing that its death rate is high; that certain diseases are taking more than their fair toll of human life from its ranks, and that many of these diseases are preventable. With this realization, many Negroes have set to work to improve their living conditions and reduce mortality.

As might be expected, the medical profession was among the first to realize this and to seek for improvement. In the year 1895 the National Medical Association, composed of representative Negroes in the practice of medicine, dentistry and pharmacy, was organized in the city of Atlanta, with the object of improving the conditions of Negro professional men, and through them, helping to educate the masses along the line of better health and right living. The influence of this organization has been felt in most of the country east of the Mississippi river, from Boston in the North, to Atlanta in the South. At its annual sessions, one of the chief features has been at least one public session, for the benefit of the people, when subjects of popular interest are discussed in simple language. Among the topics thus presented are the following: The Cause, Prevention, and Treatment of Tuberculosis; Infant Mortality; The Proper Care and Feeding of Infants, etc.

That these discussions have been appreciated by the laity is attested by the fact that they have always been given in crowded halls, and we have every reason to believe that they have done good.

Before the organization of the National Medical Association, there were in existence few state and local medical societies among

the Negroes. Most of those that were in existence have affiliated with the National, and a great many others have been organized under its influence. At the present time, nearly every state having a sufficient number of Negro physicians has its medical society, and, aside from this, nearly all the cities and many of the large towns also have local societies; and almost without exception, to a variable degree, they are striving to help the Negro people attain to higher planes of living, and thus improve their health and reduce their death rate.

Early in the year 1910, the executive board of the National Medical Association appointed a commission to study tuberculosis, hookworm disease, and pellagra among the Negroes. These reports, though incomplete, furnished one of the interesting features of the last meeting of the association.

A few illustrations may be mentioned. In 1908 the Bay State Medical Society of Boston, Mass., began a series of public meetings. The first meeting was held Sunday, February 3, the general subject of "Hygiene" being discussed under the following heads: "Oral Hygiene," "Personal Hygiene," and "Practical Hygiene." In March, the general subject of "Water" was discussed as follows: "Contamination of Water," "Purification of Water," "Medicinal Uses of Water." In April, "Milk" was the general subject, and was discussed as follows: "Human Milk and Its Advantages," "Contamination of Milk," "Infant Feeding." In May the general subject of "Tuberculosis" was discussed as follows: First, "Past, Present and Future of Tuberculosis;" second, "Channels of Infection, and Early Symptoms;" third, "Efforts Being Made to Control the Disease."

These meetings were all well attended, and evinced a surprising amount of interest on the part of the people in all walks of life. Since that season the society has held many similar meetings in all the colored churches of the city. Similar meetings have been held by the North Jersey Medical Society. It is the policy of this society to hold four of these meetings each year.

At the last meeting of the Louisiana Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Association, one hundred dollars was appropriated by the society as a nucleus for the establishment of a tuberculosis hospital for the treatment of Negro patients. A committee has been appointed to formulate plans and secure a location. An Anti-

Tuberculosis League has been established by Negro physicians of Louisiana. Lectures on hygiene, sanitation, and tuberculosis are delivered by Negro physicians to schools, associations, and summer normals. A public health car has been put into service by the Louisiana State Board of Health, which is admirably equipped, for the purpose of traveling through the state, stopping at various towns and cities, where lectures are delivered on hygiene and sanitation.

The Alabama Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Association has for a number of years devoted especial attention to topics pertaining to the health and sanitary conditions of the people. At its meeting in Selma, in 1909, one evening session was devoted to the subject of tuberculosis, in one of the largest churches in the city, which was packed with an interested and appreciative audience.

The Lone Star Medical, Dental and Pharmaceutical Association of Texas holds annual meetings, and, aside from the purely professional aspects of these gatherings, especial attention is paid to health topics.

The Medico-Chirurgical Society of New York, for the past year has been teaching the people by means of lectures in the different churches, etc.

The Medico-Chirurgical Society of the District of Columbia, with a membership of seventy or eighty, devotes much of its attention to topics pertaining to the public health. An anti-tuberculosis league has been formed in the city of Washington, with a membership of about 2,000.

In addition to what the Negro physicians are doing in an organized way, a tremendous amount of work—a great deal of it unheard of outside of their immediate communities—is being done by individual physicians. Without doubt, the Negro physician is one of the most potent forces for the uplift of the race, and there seems to be a growing realization on his part of what his great responsibilities are in this regard. The great volume of his work is done in private, in his office consultations, on his daily rounds, in the churches, the secret orders, the Sunday schools, the Y. M. C. A.'s, and in a great many other gatherings, he uses his influence for the betterment of racial conditions, and at the same time for the good of the public, for it cannot be denied that whatever may

be done for the uplift of the Negro as a **race**, at the same time, helps the general public.

As an instance of the above, I might cite a few examples: Dr. A. A. Wyche, a Negro physician practicing in the city of Charlotte, N. C., was impressed with how little our young men knew about caring for their general health, and to that end began a course of Sunday afternoon lectures to boys and young men on different subjects pertaining to their welfare. He said, "It was surprising to know the good these talks have done. So many have come to me privately and expressed how much they have been helped by them." He is now preparing a series of lectures to be given to the young women. He is also giving lectures, once a week, to trained nurses, to the Ministers' Union, and the graded school teachers, upon hygiene and other medical subjects.

At Atlanta, the Fairhaven Infirmary is operated by six Negro physicians and is doing great service in offering shelter at very reasonable rates. The nurses from the nurse training department of Morris Brown College, are sent out to do charity work under the direction of physicians, and in that way carry relief to the homes of many who really need the care of a nurse, but could not pay for such services.

Dr. R. F. Boyd, of Nashville, Tenn., writes, "I have been deeply interested in this subject for a number of years. I am at present president of the Anti-tuberculosis League of Nashville, which holds bi-monthly meetings in the various churches, instructing the people as to the origin, prevention, and cure of 'The Great White Plague.' We have a committee that distributes sputum cups to those who are subject to the disease. The anti-spitting law has been so thoroughly taught that now most of the people obey it almost implicitly, and the amount of spitting on the floors, cars, and sidewalks, is very much reduced. Since we began this campaign many of our people are living in better houses, wear better clothes, and are more careful about the selection and preparation of their food. The churches, school houses, and public buildings are better ventilated and the mortality is lessened." In Lexington, the local Negro medical society frequently gives lectures on health topics, to help educate the people in the prevention, as well as treatment of disease, and special effort is made to decrease the mortality from tuberculosis.

Some of the Negro insurance companies are alive to the issue, and are taking steps to benefit the health and prolong the lives of their policy holders. The North Carolina Mutual and Provident Association, of Durham, N. C., through Dr. A. M. Moore, its medical director, advises that "The most potent method is the bedside instruction given by agents and superintendents while paying sick claims. This comes at a time when one is more inclined to receive instruction. Through our annual agents' conference, I give a daily lecture on sanitation, contagions, and preventable diseases, and explain the danger of flies and water supply, as well as buying second-hand bedding, carpets or clothes; moving into houses in which contagious sickness has been prior, especially tuberculosis cases. We try to make every agent a sanitary officer. We issue a quarterly bulletin which is an advertising chart, one page of which is devoted to 'Sanitation and Health Hints.'

"I have succeeded in having several district physicians' societies organized, which meet in different cities, holding public meetings on sanitation, hygiene, and contagious diseases. We are constantly urging the agents, by circular letters and talks, to strive in every way to better the condition of the people in as many ways as possible."

The Union Mutual Aid Association, of Mobile, Ala., distributes through its agents, from time to time, helpful literature. Health talks are given to the agents by physicians. The agents are required, as cause and opportunity present, to speak to the policy holders on improving their sanitary surroundings.

The Union Mutual Aid Association is inaugurating this year the plan of giving small sums of money to the health department of a number of municipalities of the state, to be applied to sanitary improvement. It is not expected that the fund presented will accomplish very much, but it will help to wake the colored people up to the fact that some of the more thoughtful of the race are alive to the necessity of making tangible effort along this line. The company is planning at some time in the future to give one yearly medical examination to its policy holders at any time the policy holder, in good standing, may elect to take the same.

The Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute, Hampton, Va., is doing good work at its annual conferences, by bringing together race leaders and teachers, physicians, etc., and among other

subjects discussing the health conditions among the Negroes. At the 1909 conference the Anti-tuberculosis League of Virginia was organized. In Elizabeth City county they are trying to teach the people that consumption is curable if taken in hand in time, and to apply to an intelligent physician for treatment, instead of going to the druggist or taking patent medicines.

Great efforts are being made in Norfolk to prevent the spread of consumption. Some four years ago the Anti-tuberculosis League opened a free clinic for the treatment of consumption; three days in the week being devoted to colored patients, and for the year ending September 30, 1909, sixty-four colored patients were treated at this clinic. "These patients were supplied with sputum cups, medicine, and printed instructions as to how to take care of themselves and protect themselves from infection, thus aiding in their own cure and protecting others from becoming victims of the disease." In October, 1909, a tuberculosis clinic was opened in the city of Norfolk for the colored people, with a trained nurse in charge, and seven colored physicians on the clinic staff in charge of the work. The city paid the salary of the nurses and expenses of the clinic; the physicians volunteered their services. From October 1, 1909, to June 1, 1910, one hundred and three patients were treated at this clinic. The nurse was required to follow up the patients who attended the clinics and give them instructions in their houses. One thousand six hundred and eighty-five such visits were made during the past year.

An Anti-tuberculosis League was organized in Portsmouth, Va., April 30, 1909. On October 19, 1909, the Richmond branch of the colored Anti-tuberculosis League was organized. This league has held a series of public meetings at churches. The third Sunday in January, 1910, was observed as tuberculosis day. A sermon on tuberculosis was preached in nearly every colored church in Richmond, and literature bearing on the subject was distributed. The visiting committee of the league, with Miss Mary F. Clark, a registered nurse, as chairman, did very important work by affiliating with the city health authorities in hunting up tubercular patients and providing proper treatment. The committee divided the city into districts and nurses were assigned to each district. Food, clothing, medicine, and even fuel have been furnished for the sick. Persons have been taught how to care for the sick, and how to

clean and care for their houses, and in some instances cooking lessons were given, and in many other ways this committee has helped along the work. The membership of the league is about four hundred.

Another element in the work of improving the health of the Negroes is the rise of the Negro hospitals. Dr. George W. Hubbard, dean of Meharry Medical College, reports that the graduates of Meharry own and control six institutions of this kind in Tennessee, two in Oklahoma, five in Texas, and one each in Missouri, Colorado and Georgia. These hospitals and sanatoriums have been well patronized, and have proven financially successful and have done much to prevent the sufferings of the colored people. Space will not permit me to do more than barely mention the names of a great many others, which are either owned or controlled by Negroes: Provident Hospital, Chicago; Freedman's Hospital, Washington; The Frederick Douglass Memorial Hospital, Philadelphia; The Plymouth Hospital in Boston; the Provident Hospital in St. Louis; the Provident Hospital in Baltimore, Md.; the Mercy Hospital, Philadelphia; the Richmond Hospital, and the Woman's Central League Hospital in Richmond, Va.; the Lincoln Hospital at Durham, N. C.; the St. Agnes Hospital, and the Shaw University Hospital at Raleigh; the Hospital and Nurse Training School at Charleston, S. C.; the Charity Hospital at Savannah, Ga.; the McVicar Hospital at Spellman Seminary, Atlanta; the Fairhaven Infirmary, Atlanta; the Lamar Hospital, Augusta; the Burrus Sanatorium, Augusta; the Tuskegee Institute Hospital, Tuskegee Institute, Ala.; the Hale Infirmary, Montgomery; the Northcross Sanatorium, Montgomery; the Cottage Home Infirmary, Decatur; the Old Folks' Home and Hospital, Birmingham; the Burwell Sanitarium, Selma; the Harris Infirmary, Mobile; the Kenniebrew Sanatorium, in Jacksonville, Ill.; the Red Cross Sanatorium, Louisville, Ky.; the Burt Sanatorium, Clarksville, Tenn. and the Perry Sanatorium, Kansas City, Mo.

Along with the establishment of Negro hospitals have arisen the nurses' training schools. Most of the hospitals mentioned above have connected with them such schools, which are sending out from year to year, a large number of colored women, who are not only getting ready employment among the white people but are

taking their share of the burden of spreading the gospel of good health and right living among Negroes.

The Associated Charities of Birmingham, Ala., employs a colored nurse to do settlement work, and furnishes medical attention without charge where needed.

Under the supervision of the Visiting Nurses' Association, of Chicago, there are four of the graduate nurses of Provident Hospital working among the Negroes, also one graduate of this hospital is a member of the school nurses' force. Her work is in the school, where a large per cent of the pupils are Negroes. In all probability, in the near future, another Negro nurse will be added to the tuberculosis nurse force. A tuberculosis dispensary is about to be established in connection with Provident Hospital.

From the third annual report of the Chicago Tuberculosis Institute, 1908, we quote, "Early in February a mass meeting of colored people was held in Fulton Hall. The result of this meeting was the formation of a strong Negro committee, which has done active work during the year, and among other things arranged for a dozen or more Sunday services at the different colored churches in the city, with sermons on tuberculosis."

Dr. Anna R. Cooper, a colored physician, is the leader of a movement to establish the Paul Lawrence Dunbar Sanitarium for the treatment of tuberculosis among Negroes. "Governor Hadley, of Missouri, has recently appointed an important tuberculosis commission. The object of the commission is to find out just what the sanitary conditions are among the Negroes." The Municipal Health Leagues were recently formed by both the white and colored people of Raleigh, N. C.

At Asheville, N. C., in both colored and white schools, the modern health drinking faucets have been established, and other improvements in sanitation have been installed.

Much is being done to improve the conditions in Savannah, Ga. The Men's Sunday Club, colored, of that city was organized in 1905. It has had an average attendance since organization of two hundred people. About every colored physician in the city has spoken before the club. In the summer of 1905 a regular campaign for health improvement was carried on. All the colored churches were visited and addresses made at each one by physicians

and others. Mothers' clubs were organized especially to assist in improving health conditions.

The colored Knights of Pythias are helping to restore to health a great many people, by having established, in 1908, at Hot Springs, Ark., a bath house and sanitarium, where thousands of colored people have gone and received benefit by the scientific application of the waters.

The Tuskegee Institute has been alive to this movement, and in numerous ways has attempted to improve conditions in the school, in the surrounding communities and in other places. Several forces have co-operated along this line.

The American tuberculosis exhibition, under the direction of Mr. E. G. Routzahn, paid a visit to the Institute in December, 1908, remaining several days, giving stereopticon lectures, health talks, as well as displaying the exhibit to thousands of visitors, including those connected with the school, the town of Tuskegee and the surrounding community. At the same time a Tuberculosis Congress was held, where important subjects concerning tuberculosis and the health of the Negro were discussed.

At the annual Negro conference of 1909 the subject, "General Health Conditions of Negroes in the Southern States," was discussed under the following headings:

"How the ministers can assist in bringing about better health conditions;" "What the teacher can do to improve our health conditions;" "How the doctor can assist in improving our general health conditions;" "Food and its relations to health."

The late Dr. S. P. Lloyd, of Savannah, Ga., led the discussion with a paper on health conditions from the physician's standpoint. He gave as the general causes of the high death rate among the Negroes poor housing conditions, bad landlords, dissipation, ignorance. He advocated improving these conditions by general education, by public instruction through the newspapers, physicians and ministers; that the municipalities ought to see that better houses are built for the Negroes. He also advocated the systematic and permanent co-operation of the Negroes themselves.

Bishop Alstork told how the church could help. During the discussion individual communion cups were advocated, also that lodges should hold shorter sessions; that churches should not be swept out Sunday mornings just before services.

The Tuskegee Institute has also assisted in this work by the publication of bulletins of health, under the direction of the resident physician. These topics have included, "Tuberculosis," "Typhoid Fever," "The Danger of Flies," and other topics along sanitary lines. Stereopticon lectures on tuberculosis, general sanitation, and the hookworm disease have been given, and other health talks to students and teachers in the school; also to the Macon County Farmers' Institute, the Macon County Teachers' Institute, and to some of the Negro churches.

Four years ago, in connection with the hospital, there was inaugurated among the women, what is known as the Hospital Aid Society, composed of an advisory board of ten women and members at large, from the school and community. This society has done a great deal to help improve conditions at the Institute Hospital; to make patients and nurses more comfortable; to visit the sick in the community; in many instances furnishing medical attention and nurse's services, as well as nourishment and medicine for those too poor to pay for these necessities. It also maintains a charity room and bed at the Institute Hospital in which suitable indigent patients are taken for operative and other treatment free of charge. At the last general meeting of this society it was interesting to hear some of these poor patients tell with gratitude how they have been helped.

Quite recently all of the school children attending the children's house, about two hundred, were examined by the resident physician and his assistants. A great many defects were found, parents were advised of the same, and directed to physicians, dentists and specialists, as the condition required, in order that the defects might be remedied.

The colored women's clubs are working to improve the homes through reading circles, by teaching domestic science, and by other means. Some of the clubs are conducting homes for aged men and women, and for boys and girls. The Boys' Reformatory at Mount Meigs, Ala., where thirty-seven boys and two men are cared for, on land that cost five hundred dollars, with a building costing twelve hundred dollars, is an example.

The Women's Club of Tuskegee Institute is especially active. Houses are visited with a view to teaching the people the simple principles of hygiene. The smallest details are looked after, as how

to prepare and serve their food, how and when to bathe, how to ventilate their houses, how to care for their hair, the washing of their clothing, cleaning their teeth, sleeping between sheets, and all such subjects as tend to improve their home conditions. The special subjects of tuberculosis and typhoid fever have been discussed before the people in the most elementary manner possible. Mrs. Booker T. Washington says, "The people themselves are most responsive and co-operative, and that as a result of the work which has been done along these lines, great improvements have been made."